

## II

### RITUAL, SYMBOLISM, AND THE NATIVE VIEW

## SWASTIKA: A NEW SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION

*by Stanley A. Freed and Ruth S. Freed*

Known by a word derived from Sanskrit that means "object of well-being," the swastika (figure 1a) is humanity's oldest and most widespread symbol of any complexity. The only constant interpretive fact about it is that it symbolizes good luck (Brown 1933:17-18). Although its origins are lost in antiquity, it probably first appeared in western Asia in an area bounded by the Indus River, Mesopotamia, and the Hellespont in the fourth millennium B.C. (Brown 1933:19, 23; John 1941:50). It subsequently spread over Europe and parts of Asia by the early centuries of the Christian era, and reputed examples from pre-Columbian times have been identified in the New World (D'Alviella 1894, Plate III; Wilson 1896:889). Scholarly fascination with the swastika derives from its antiquity, its wide distribution, and its mysterious magical quality, which was apparent before the Third Reich had impressed the symbol into the consciousness of the world in the 1930s and 1940s. Heiden describes the impact of its first public display in pre-war Germany: "In 1921, Hitler's new red banner with a black swastika in a white disk was unfurled in the open for the first time. The effect was so inflammatory that Hitler himself was surprised and pleased. [It] gave Hitler one of his mightiest magical weapons. . . . An uncanny power emanated from the mysterious sign" (Heiden 1944:143-144).<sup>1</sup>

The symbolic meaning of the swastika is basic to the formulation of a definition that distinguishes the true swastika from unrelated but similar symbols. An inquiry into its symbolism is hampered by the relative absence of adequate historical information and a noteworthy disagreement among authorities on important points. In the absence of a revealing archaeological discovery, the original symbolism will never be known with certainty; nevertheless, an investigation of the subject is justified because it bears on several matters of consequence: the dif-

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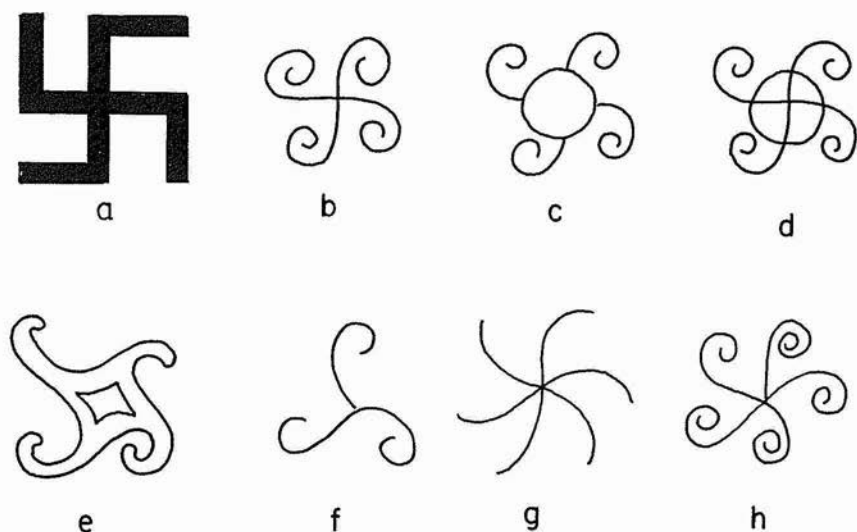


FIG. 1. SWASTIKA (a) AND ALLEGED VARIANT FORMS (b-h). Source: Wilson 1896, Fig. 13a-d.

fusion and reinterpretation of a symbol, the migration of populations, independent invention versus diffusion, the function of symbols in human cognition, and the remarkable tenacity of the psychological effect of an ancient symbol that largely accounts for the often remarked “mystic power” of the swastika (e.g., Shirer 1959:72).

An exhaustive treatment of the literature dealing with various aspects of the problem of the swastika is beyond the scope of a short essay. We propose to present only enough background discussion that the reader may have some idea of the complexity of the problem and then to offer our own symbolic interpretation, which, to the best of our knowledge, has not been proposed by other writers on the swastika. Our interpretation is based on recent observations of the use of the swastika in rural northern India, which indicate that the swastika is a symbol that may represent ancient planetary gods. The history and distribution of the swastika appear to support this interpretation.

#### FORM

The swastika, known also as the grammadion, *croix gammée*, *Hakenkreuz*, and *fylfot*, is a right-angled cross, the arms of which are

equal in length, each arm with an extension set at a right angle to its end, all four extensions pointing in the same direction, either right (clockwise) or left (counterclockwise). Various authors identify as swastikas a number of symbols that resemble it. Several such symbols are illustrated in figure 1. These variant forms of the swastika, if such they are, present a problem with regard to its history and distribution, especially in the New World, for almost all of the alleged pre-Columbian New World swastikas appear to be variant forms.

#### ORIGIN AND DISTRIBUTION

The earliest recorded occurrences of the swastika seem to have been at Samarra in central Mesopotamia and at Susa in western Iran, where clear swastikas appear on pottery from about 4000 B.C. (John 1941, Plate C; our figure 2). Somewhat later, the swastika was depicted on pottery from Hissarlik and on seals from the Harappan civilization. By the beginning of the Christian era, the swastika was well established in an area from India through western Asia into Europe. This zone can be considered the area of the primary diffusion of the swastika. It is no coincidence, as will be seen in the discussion of symbolism, that the zone of primary diffusion largely coincides with the area settled by speakers of Indo-European languages. At present, the use of the swastika is most prominent in India, where it is frequently used in ceremonies and as a decorative motif, for example, on houses.

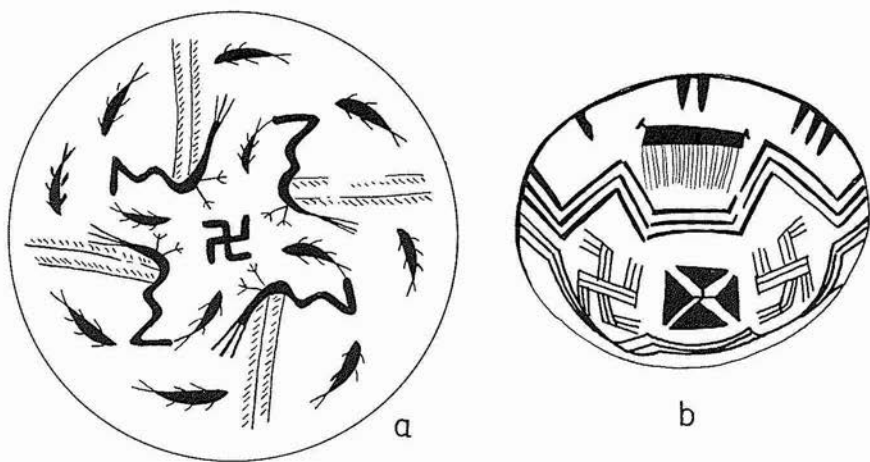


FIG. 2. FULLY PRESERVED POTTERY VESSEL FROM SAMARRA with a swastika at the center of a design featuring animals (a). CLAY VESSEL FROM SUSA with two swastikas (b). Source: John 1941, Plates C. 5, 6, p. 55.

A generally later diffusion of the swastika took place in central and eastern Asia. The swastika had been adopted by Buddhism from Hinduism, and as Buddhism spread from India into Tibet, China, and Japan, the swastika traveled with it. In its later travels, it retained its constant symbolic meaning of good luck.

The most vexing distributional problem regarding the swastika is its occurrence in the New World in pre-Columbian times. The problem has three aspects: whether the true swastika can be identified at all in the pre-Columbian New World, the frequency of such occurrences, and whether they are due to diffusion, pre-Columbian migration, or independent invention. Our comments on these matters should be regarded as provisional, for we have not systematically consulted archaeological site reports. Nonetheless, we have investigated several claims of the occurrence of pre-Columbian swastikas and find that all but one of them must be regarded as dubious. The principal problem is that the so-called swastikas are generally variant forms. A good example of this problem is the "water jug with figure of swastika" from Arkansas illustrated in Wilson (1896, figure 254) and reproduced here as figure 3. The alleged swastika appears to be a cross in a circle, a relatively common motif among the pre-Columbian populations of the United States, and, incidentally, one that occurs in the Old World.

There appears to have been a tendency to accept uncritically statements about the alleged occurrence of the swastika in pre-Columbian

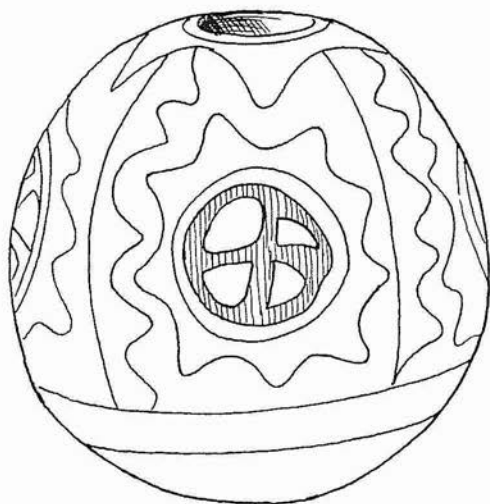


FIG. 3. WATER JUG FROM ARKANSAS with cross-in-a-circle decoration. Source: Wilson 1896, Fig. 254.

America. For example, Webb and Baby (1957:107) list the swastika as a motif from the Moundville site in Alabama because Moore describes and illustrates a copper gorget that "shows a central swastika formed by excision" (Moore 1905, figure 134, quotation from p. 217). We have reproduced Moore's illustration as figure 4a and believe that it requires a fair amount of imagination to discern a swastika in the indicated symbol. Webb and Baby (1957:106) also accept as a swastika a design from the Etowah site in Georgia that Moorehead (1932, figure 22) illustrates and describes as a "Breastplate of copper. . . . Circles enclosing a swastika." This design (figure 4b) is similar to the one from Moundville. In neither of these cases is the characteristic hooked-cross swastika apparent. Both designs are best regarded as variants of the cross-in-a-circle motif. Moore provides a clear example of this particular variant of the cross and circle in his illustration of the design on a pot that shows

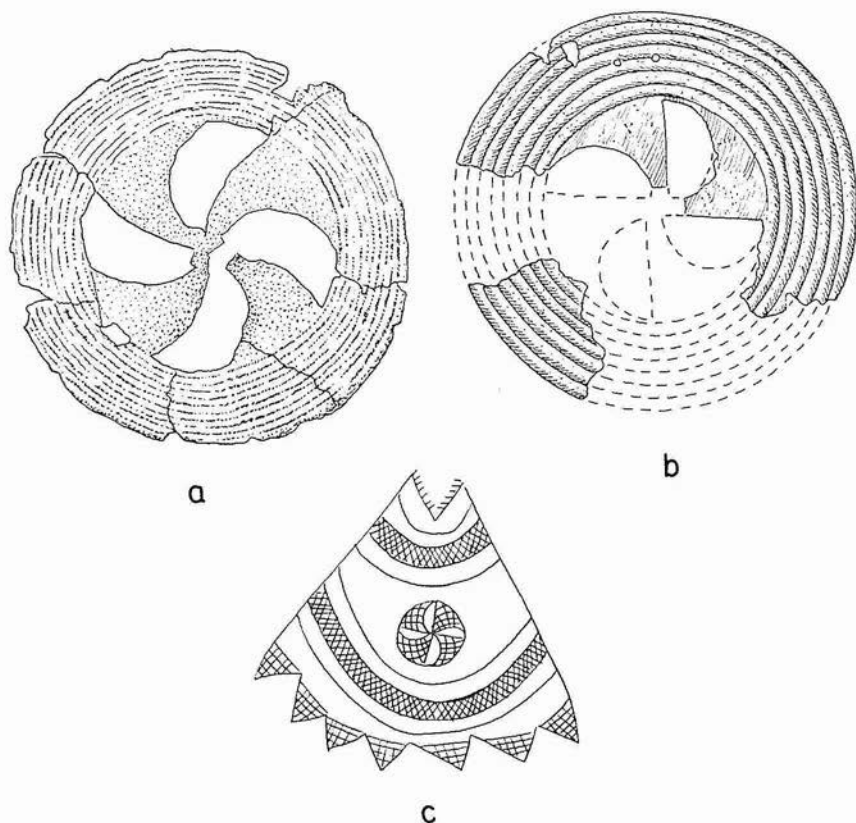


FIG. 4. DESIGNS REPRESENTING THE CROSS-IN-A-CIRCLE from the Moundville site, Alabama (a, c) and the Etowah site, Georgia (b). Sources: Moore 1905, Figs. 89, 90, 134; Moorehead 1932, Fig. 22.

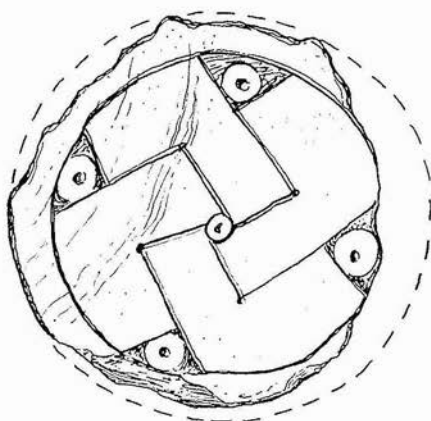


FIG. 5. VARIANT OF THE CROSS-IN-A-CIRCLE DESIGN FROM TENNESSEE. The intersecting arms of the cross create the effect of a swastika at the intersection. Source: Holmes 1884, Fig. 140.

"four triangular tails of the woodpecker. . . . On each tail is a swastika" (Moore 1905, figures 89, 90, quotation from p. 190). We have reproduced the design as figure 4c.

A pre-Columbian shell ornament from Fains Island, Tennessee (figure 5), provides an example of the disagreement of scholars concerning the interpretation of the form of a symbol. Holmes (1884, figure 140, quotation from p. 467) describes the design as follows: "The design, enclosed by a circle, represents a cross such as would be formed by two rectangular tablets or slips slit longitudinally and interlaced at right angles to each other." Wilson (1896:879) declares that "The incised lines of this design (fig. 237) represent the Swastika turned to the left (though the description does not recognize it as such)." Our opinion is that the design is a slight variant of the common cross-in-a-circle motif of the southeastern United States. The rectangular arms are slit and interlaced so that the lines formed by the intersection of the arms of the cross appear to form a swastika. This feature is, however, an incidental characteristic of this particular variant of the cross and circle.

The uncritical acceptance of variants as swastikas can result in strained theoretical interpretations. Thus, Wilson suggests that the occurrence of the swastika on shells from Tennessee, which he regards as incontestable, and another shell from the same area, which depicts a figure that "to all appearances . . . represents one of the Buddhist divinities . . . presents a set of circumstances corresponding with [the possibility of the migration of Buddhism from Asia]" (Wilson 1896:881-882). Although such a conclusion cannot be entirely dismissed, it is best

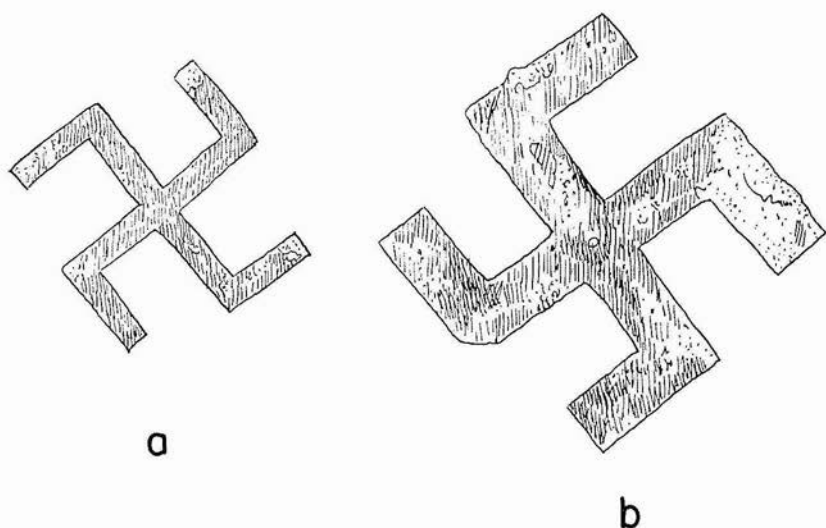


FIG. 6. COPPER SWASTIKAS FROM ONE OF THE HOPEWELL MOUNDS, OHIO. Source: Moorehead 1922, Plate LXVII.

to insist that the amount of supporting evidence be in proportion to the importance of a theory; in the case of Buddhist influence, the evidence appears to be too scanty and dubious to support the conclusion.

A cache of copper objects found in one of the Hopewell mounds, Ross County, Ohio, included several swastikas, two of which are depicted in Moorehead (1922, plate LXVII). They are clear swastikas reproduced here as figure 6, and their pre-Columbian date cannot be seriously challenged. Their presence poses the questions of their symbolic meaning and whether they are the result of influence from Eurasia or a case of independent invention. The first question can probably never be answered. As for the second, the fact that these copper swastikas are unique and there appear to be no comparable objects from other sites in adjacent regions argues for a very cautious vote for independent invention.

Nuttall (1901, Plate II) illustrates an arrangement of the years of the 52-year cycle from Central Mexico as a variant form of the swastika. The symbol (figure 7) departs from the cross-and-circle motif so widespread in the southeastern United States only in four slight gaps that occur in the circle adjacent to the ends of the arms, which permit the figure to be viewed as a counterclockwise swastika. We prefer to interpret the symbol as a cross and circle because it appears to resemble that design more closely than that of the typical hooked-cross swastika. In any case, a pre-Columbian date for the symbol is not certain.



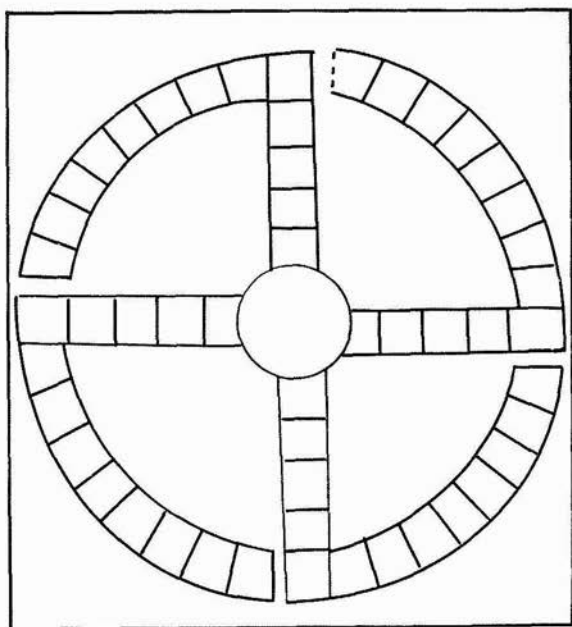


FIG. 7. SIMPLIFIED SKETCH OF AN ARRANGEMENT OF THE YEARS OF THE 52-YEAR CYCLE from Central Mexico. Source: Nuttall 1901, Plate II.

#### SYMBOLISM

Scholars have proposed a considerable number of theories for the symbolic meaning of the swastika: that it represents the sun, the moon, the yearly rotation of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, cardinal points, eternity, Zeus, Baal, fire, several Hindu deities (among them Agni, Indra, Vishnu, and Ganesh), light, forked lightning, water, the union of the sexes, fertility, and a fire-making apparatus known as the fire drill (Wilson 1896:770-791; Nuttall 1901:15-21; Daniélou 1964:295; Brower 1907:241-243; Mitra 1932; Davis 1967:146; d'Alviella 1894:44-83).

In forming these theories, their advocates have generally relied on the occurrence of the swastika in contexts that appear to provide clues to its symbolism, the alleged substitution of the swastika for symbols of recognized meaning or its proximity to them, or to the reputed natural functioning of the human mind. We provide a few of these theories as illustrations. John (1941:50) argues, for example, that "The *swastika*, which from the earliest times was so closely associated with woman, must, like the female figures themselves, have been a fecundity symbol." He cites such evidence as the presence of the swastika on female face-

urns from Troy dating to about 3000 B.C. and on objects associated with women, such as spindle-whorls and loom-weights.

It is commonly proposed that the swastika represents the sun. Count Goblet d'Alviella (1894), following several other authors, supports the theory largely on the basis of the association of the swastika with symbols, images, and deities of the sun. The frontispiece of his book, for example, depicts the painting on a krater of Apulian provenance from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna: Apollo is shown in a quadriga surrounded by a radiate disk with a swastika on his breast. Baldwin (1916:50) regards this painting as of crowning importance for the meaning of the swastika, for Apollo is here clearly represented as a sun-god. Wilson (1896:785-788, quotation from p. 788), however, examined the argument and concluded that "the theory remains undemonstrated."

Nuttall (1901:14-23, quotation from p. 21) advances a theory based chiefly on "ideas which would naturally suggest themselves to the mind of the primitive observer." Such a person, observing the yearly rotation of Ursa Major around the pole star and concentrating upon its image at four equidistant positions, would perceive the form of a swastika. Her own experience illustrates the mental processes involved. "In a flash of mental vision I perceived a quadrupled image of the entire constellation, standing out in scintillating brilliancy from the intense darkness of the wintry sky. . . . it bore the semblance of a symmetrical swastika of giant proportions. . . . I left my window, on that memorable night, with a growing perception of the deep and powerful influence the prolonged observation of Polaris and the circumpolar constellations would naturally have exerted upon the mind of primitive man" (Nuttall 1916:14-15).

The claims of such theorists regarding the symbolic meaning of the swastika suffer from the unknown origin of the symbol, the fact that ancient symbols often acquire many meanings, and especially from the lack of a clear connection between the form of the swastika and its alleged meaning. The circular sun is not readily apparent in the angular swastika; the connection of the swastika and, for example, an elephant-headed deity (Ganesh) or the union of the sexes is even more dubious.

#### SYMBOLISM OF THE SWASTIKA IN RURAL NORTH INDIA

The swastika is a prominent symbolic element in the ritual life of rural north India, especially in ceremonies that mark a beginning, such as the rites of birth and marriage. A priest officiating at such ceremonies sometimes draws a swastika as an element of the symbolic design depicted in colored powders on the ground that serves as an altar for the fire ceremony. In ceremonies of birth and marriage, and at festivals,

women often draw swastikas on pots, on the ground, and on walls. When a symbol representing a festival has been removed after the conclusion of the festival, women sometimes draw a swastika to replace it in order that no evil spirit may enter into the empty space.

In the course of recent anthropological fieldwork in rural north India, during one of the series of rituals that constitutes a wedding we observed the swastika used in a way that suggests that it represents nine ancient planetary deities known in Hinduism as the *graha*.<sup>2</sup> These deities are the five planets visible to the naked eye (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), sun, moon, and the ascending and descending nodes of the moon, which are conceived of as demons that pursue the sun and moon and cause eclipses.

The wedding ritual in question is known as *Barat Lena* (Reception of the Wedding Party), during which the groom is welcomed by the bride's family. A large brass tray containing sacred paraphernalia and symbols had been prepared for the ceremony. On the tray was drawn a faint swastika in turmeric. At each of the nine points that, when connected, define its form (the center, vertices of the angles, and the end points of the arms), a pile of rice had been placed (figures 8, 9).

We suggest that the nine piles of rice arranged in a three-by-three square may reveal the symbolic meaning of the swastika. In Hindu *samskaras* (orthodox ceremonies), the *graha* are usually represented by nine squares in a three-by-three pattern, each one often bearing the symbol of a specific deity, or more simply by nine dots. The central square represents the sun, the creating principle. Around it are arranged the other planetary deities that, together with the sun, represent the entire universe. That drawings of the *graha* are intended to encompass creation and the universe is further indicated by a short projecting line usually drawn at one edge of the three-by-three pattern of squares (see figure 10); the projection beyond the squares stands for the multitude of deities not represented by the drawing of the *graha*.

The symbolism of the swastika is probably contained in its nine points representing the planetary deities. The lines are principally a dramatic way of connecting the points to make them more visible; they give a feeling of motion and excitement. The swastika was probably used as a substitute for squares or other representations of the planetary gods so long ago that the connection of the swastika, the squares, and the *graha* has been forgotten. On one level, the swastika represents the planetary deities; at a deeper, or more general level, it represents the power of creation and the universe, just as does the three-by-three drawing of squares that also represents the *graha*.



FIG. 8 *BARAT LENA* (RECEPTION OF THE WEDDING PARTY). Between the bridegroom, who wears an elaborate headdress and necklace, and the priest is a brass tray containing sacred paraphernalia and symbols. Visible are nine piles of rice in a three-by-three square (two piles are obscured by the right hand of the priest). Faintly visible bands of turmeric that form the figure of a swastika under the piles of rice can be seen between some of the piles. The contrast of yellow turmeric on a brass tray was weak and so not all of the figure of the swastika can be seen in the photograph, which is a conversion from a color slide. Source: authors.

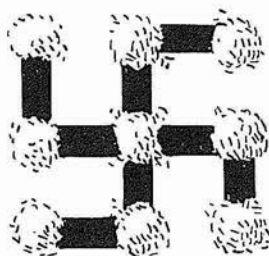


FIG. 9. SKETCH OF THE SWASTIKA from the photograph of *BARAT LENA* (Fig. 8) showing the nine piles of rice and the bands of turmeric connecting them. Source: authors.

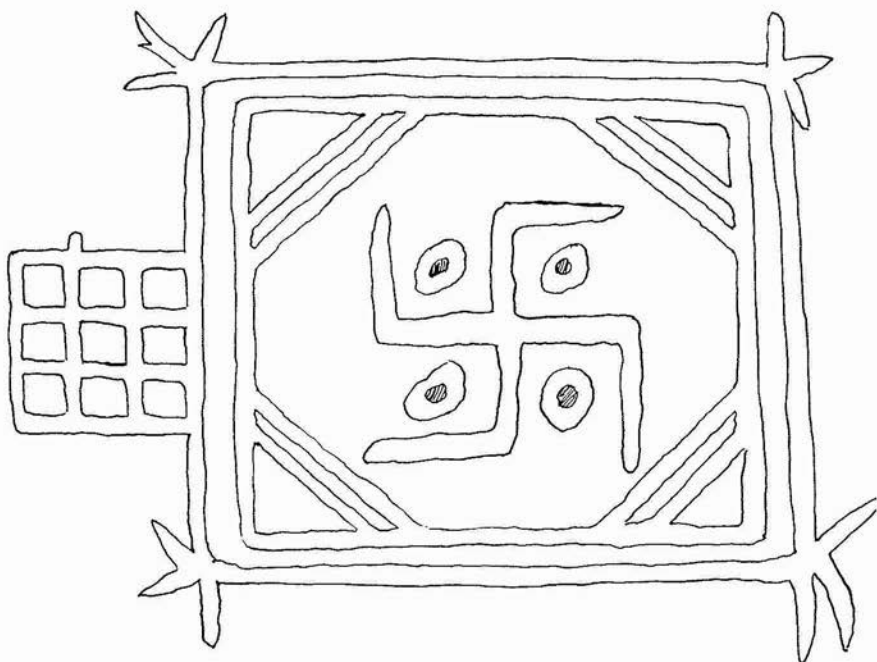


FIG. 10. DESIGN DRAWN ON THE GROUND to serve as an altar for a ceremony to forestall the inauspicious effects of the Mula Nakshatra. The central square that encloses the swastika has three appendages at each corner. Similar appendages are sometimes added to swastikas from Samarra and Susa (John 1941: 53, 54, Plates C. 3, 4). The nine small squares attached to the left side of the large square represent the *graha*. Source: drawn from a photograph by the authors.

That the connection of the swastika and the planetary deities has, to the best of our knowledge, eluded previous writers on the swastika is due largely to misdirection. Once they focused their attention on the arms of the symbol, the nine points became psychologically invisible. The nine piles of rice and the faintness of the underlying swastika directed our attention to the points as the significant feature of the swastika. In the context of a wedding ceremony where the nine planetary deities are so prominent, once the swastika was viewed as a figure with nine points the connection of the symbol and the planetary deities became obvious.

The interpretation of the swastika as a symbol of the planetary deities offers an explanation for a heretofore inadequately explained elaboration of the swastika that occurs both in the Mediterranean region and in India: the swastika with four dots in the angles of the intersecting arms. Baldwin (1916:29, 40; figures 15, 16) depicts two examples, a vase from Melos from the second millennium B.C. and a clay disk from Thera, reproduced here as figure 11, and she discusses other examples from Greece and Troy.

We observed a similar variation of the swastika used in a ceremony in rural north India. A design (figure 10) had been drawn in colored powders on the ground to serve as an altar for a fire ceremony to forestall the unfortunate effects that birth under an inauspicious astrological sign could have on a recently born male infant and his family. As the moon revolves through the heavens, it passes near twenty-seven conspicuous stars or groups of stars that were recognized and named in ancient times (Freed and Freed 1964:68). Of these twenty-seven lunar mansions (nakshatras), some were believed to be auspicious and some inauspicious. Rural north Indians believed that the Mula Nakshatra had the most evil influence. The ceremony that we observed was for the benefit of a male infant born under this sign.

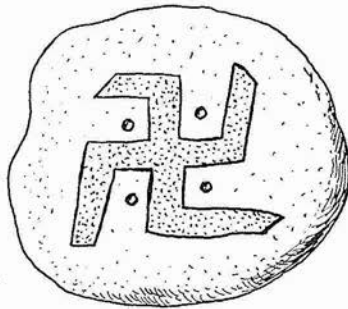


FIG. 11. CLAY DISK FROM THERA. Source: Baldwin 1916, Fig. 16.



The fact that the swastika with four dots was drawn for a ceremony involved with one of the lunar mansions provides the clue to the interpretation of the dots. In Hindu mythology, the twenty-seven lunar mansions were the daughters of Daksha (Ritual-Skill), who gave them to the Moon as wives. The first offspring of this union were four planets, Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter (Daniélou 1964:98; Bentley 1970:2-5). Bentley (1970:4-5) attributes this myth to "occultations of the planets by the Moon in the respective Lunar Mansions . . . [in] the year 1424-5 B.C. . . . Saturn is not mentioned among these births, probably from his being situated out of the Moon's course." Thus, the four dots in the angles of the swastika may represent the four planets born from the union of the Moon and four nakshatras; this added symbolic element is appropriate in a ceremony conducted for a nakshatra. The symbolism of the swastika is consistently that of planetary deities.

The only other explanation of dots accompanying the swastika that we have seen comes in conjunction with the theory that the swastika represents the ancient Indian fire drill. The dots are supposed to represent four nails that secured four arms of the hearth of the fire drill. A dot at the center of the intersecting arms represented the hole into which the tip of the drill was inserted and spun. Wilson (1896:777-778) summarizes the theory and criticisms of it. The difficulty about the supposed connection of the swastika and the fire drill lies in not knowing precisely the appearance of the ancient fire drill or whether nails were used to make it. Wilson cites authorities to the effect that the old Indian fire drill consisted of only two pieces of wood, a hearth and a drill, and that four nails and the swastika had nothing to do with it.

We suggest that the symbolic meaning of the swastika as deduced from its ceremonial use in modern north India could well have been its original symbolic meaning. To use the identification of the swastika with the *graha* based upon a ceremony observed in 1978 as grounds for a theory of the origins of the symbol assumes some continuity of Indian religious tradition from ancient times to the present. Such an assumption is by no means unjustified. The swastika appears on seals from the Harappan civilization, the origin of which dates to the third millennium B.C., as does another symbol, the grid, which also depicts nine points and may have been another representation of the planetary deities (figure 12). In addition, there is more than one representation on Harappan seals of a deity that closely resembles the great god Shiva of modern Hinduism as the Lord of the Beasts and Prince of Yogis. Mother goddess worship, a feature of modern Hinduism, is foreshadowed in Harappan religion; there is also evidence of some form of phallic worship and of the sacredness of the pipal tree (Piggott 1950:201-203). Piggott (1950:203) concludes that Harappan religion was "essentially Indian from the start." Links between

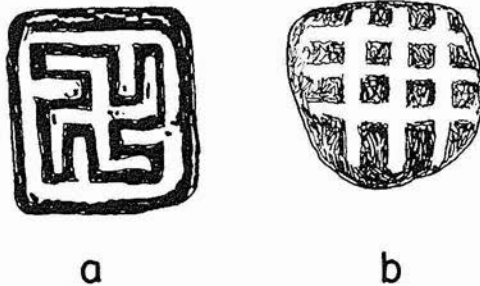


FIG. 12. DESIGNS ON HARAPPAN SEALS. Source: Fairservis 1971:275.

Harappan religion and modern Hinduism appear to be well established, and the relationship of the swastika and the planetary deities may be one such link.

#### DISCUSSION

The interpretation that we suggest depends upon more than a single, or even several, associations of the swastika and a symbol of known meaning (for example, the swastika drawn on the chiton of Apollo that we previously described); rather, it is based upon the identification of a symbol of known meaning that is an integral part of the swastika. The equation of the swastika and the planet-gods does not depend upon the occasional association of symbols; the nine points are always present, for they are part of the swastika. Moreover, it requires no leap of the imagination to see the connection of the form of the symbol and its nine referents, whereas one must make an effort to imagine, for example, an elephant-headed deity (Ganesh), the union of the sexes, a fire drill, or even the sun in the swastika.

The relationship of the swastika and the planetary gods fits the history and distribution of the symbol rather well. If its origin was in the general region of Mesopotamia and western Iran (John 1941:50, 54; White 1909:92), the necessary astronomical knowledge existed there at an early date. The Mesopotamians had identified the five planets and they had also learned to "half-predict eclipses" (Kroeber 1948:485). Thus, they knew about the ascending and descending nodes of the moon, which are the only times that eclipses can take place. Moreover, they identified the planets as gods.



When the week was invented in western Asia (Kroeber 1948:486), the names of the Babylonian planetary deities were used to designate the days. As the week diffused over the Old World, the peoples who accepted it, such as the Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Indians, renamed the days after their own deities. The absence of the swastika in Egypt, except on imported goods such as Greek pottery, can be explained by the fact that the ancient Egyptians did not equate gods and heavenly bodies, except for the Sun God; hence, the symbolism of the swastika would have had no meaning for them. If the swastika represented only the sun, it would be difficult to explain its absence in Egypt, for Re, the Sun God, was a principal deity.

The connection of heavenly body-god-weekday from India to Europe coincides with the area most anciently identified with the swastika and strengthens the interpretation of the swastika as a symbol of the planetary gods. Its comparative absence in other areas of the civilized world of antiquity, for example, Egypt, also is in accord with this interpretation. It was probably spread as much by the migration of the Indo-European tribes as by diffusion; in any case, it is more closely identified with speakers of Indo-European languages than with other populations and has found its greatest use among them. The combination of seven deities and two demons may account for its use as a symbol of good luck, for the two demons are summoned and overcome by the power of seven (an auspicious number in India, Western Asia, and Europe), thus assuring the believer that all will be well.

Acceptance of the swastika as a symbol of the planetary deities would simplify some matters that have occupied archeologists and historians. The problem of alternate forms of the swastika could be reappraised. Symbols that lack nine clearly defined points in a three-by-three pattern are in most cases probably not swastikas. A re-analysis of such forms would bear on the problem of the diffusion of the swastika, especially its alleged presence in the New World. The various spirals, volutes, ogees, and cross-in-circles that pass for swastikas in the New World probably have nothing to do with the hooked cross of the Old World. It is especially important that scholars disregard claims about the presence of New World swastikas unless their proponents provide an illustration so that an independent judgment can be made. For example, without providing an illustration, Baldwin (1916:55) says, "Pottery from Central Mexico [Toltec period] in the Natural History Museum of New York shows the [swastika] as an ornamental motif." Dr. Gordon Ekholm showed us the pottery that he thinks is in question, and the decorations are not hooked-cross swastikas.

However, the elimination of vaguely similar designs from consideration as swastikas creates a new problem: the copper swastikas from

the Hopewell mound become quite mysterious. There are designs that clearly occur in both the pre-Columbian Old and New Worlds, such as the cross-in-a-circle, that are widely spread in the New World. Why did not the swastika so diffuse? The question of why the swastika did not diffuse widely in the New World can be raised whether the Hopewell swastikas were of Old World origin or were independently invented. It is tempting to explain the general absence of the swastika in the New World as due to the fact that for some reason it tended to be identified with its original symbolism and, therefore, was not easily accepted by populations that lacked planetary deities. This explanation, however, ignores the fact that symbols are often reinterpreted as they diffuse. The form of a design and its meaning may be independent. Has the swastika been an exception?

There appear to have been two peak periods of scholarly interest in the swastika, the first around the beginning of the twentieth century and the second during the period of the Third Reich in Germany. At present, symbolic analysis is one of the noteworthy interests in anthropology. Yet one of the world's most famous, or infamous, symbols has been largely ignored. Because of the considerable number of archaeological investigations in the Old and New Worlds since the Second World War, a comprehensive investigation of the swastika would considerably advance our understanding of this mysterious symbol that recalls the half-forgotten deities and demons that guided human destiny at the dawn of civilization. Its principal heirs, the Indo-European speakers, still respond to its mystical power.

## NOTES

We thank Dr. David Hurst Thomas and Dr. Gordon F. Ekholm, who read and criticized the manuscript; Ms. Celia Orgel and Mr. Jeffrey P. Bonner, who assisted with the library research; Mr. Nicholas Amorosi, who prepared the line drawings; and Ms. Nazarie Romain, who typed the manuscript. Field research in India was sponsored by the Indo-U.S. Subcommission of Education and Culture, the Indo-American Fellowship Program, which awarded a Senior Research Fellowship to Dr. R. S. Freed, and the American Institute of Indian Studies, which granted a Senior Research Fellowship to Dr. S. A. Freed. We thank these two organizations and also the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, with which we were affiliated while in India. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr. Indera Pal Singh, Chairman of the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, and Mr. P. R. Mehendiratta, Director, American Institute of Indian Studies.

1. Shirer (1959:71) described Hitler's adoption of the swastika as the Nazi emblem as a "stroke of genius. What the party lacked, he saw, was an emblem, a flag, a symbol, which would express what the new organization stood for and appeal to the imagination of the masses. . . . Whence Hitler got the idea of using it for both the flag and the insignia of the party he does not say in a lengthy dissertation on the subject in *Mein Kampf*."

Heiden (1944:143) traced the association of the National Socialists and the swastika to Finland and Estonia where it was an official emblem. In 1918-1919, the German Free Corps fought the Bolsheviks in the Baltic region from where, presumably, they brought the swastika home with them. A brigade of these troops participated in a *putsch* in Berlin in 1920. The *putsch* was defeated, the troop disbanded, and many of its officers fled to Munich where they enrolled in Hitler's storm troopers (*Sturmabteilung*). It was they who brought the swastika to the Nazis.

2. Hindi words have been written in italics except those contained in Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged (e.g., *samskara*).

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